



ISSANJI

HARTFORD STREET ZEN CENTER

57 Hartford Street, San Francisco, California, 94114. (415) 863-2507

- SPRING 1996 - *ZEN CENTER LIBRARY*

HSZC is a neighborhood Zen Temple offering a regular practice schedule in the Castro district. It is also called Issanji, "One Mountain Temple", after its founder Issan Dorsey Roshi. The center was started in 1980 to provide a practice place for gay men, lesbians and other sentient beings. In residence is Abbot Zenshin Philip Whalen, who supervises practice and teaching. Zenshin is available for dokusan (practice interviews) to answer questions and discuss student's practice. Please make appointments with him in advance.

TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP

Abbot Zenshin Philip Whalen

One of the most destructive things about Zen is the relationship between teacher and student. First, finding a teacher to work with is difficult, then hanging out with a Zen teacher is complicated and peculiar, like getting radiation burn. I remember the worst thing my teacher Baker Roshi ever said to me, it was at Tassahara, dokusan, and he told me "You're mean to people." He didn't elaborate.

I was absolutely destroyed. People at different times in my life have told me I'm scary, but it's in the eye of the beholder. When angry I make myself ridiculous and jump up and down, but not to intentionally scare. Usually I'm frightened and upset so I holler and yell. It's difficult to get used to one's own failure to control the temper, but anger is a state of mind that doesn't last, it goes away, and shouldn't frighten us.

I got into this industry because I wanted to find out, "What is life about? What does it mean?" And

I still don't know. But the teacher is a good Buddhist friend who helps you see where you are at and what is happening. We have to do our own shining, polishing and cleaning, then we need to check out with someone who sees the process.

You go to your little zafu and all of a sudden the heavens open, ears smoke, eye balls spin, and belly button vibrates - "I got the answer! Been broken free!" You run off to the teacher who says, "Oh that's nice, now go mow the lawn - do something." And you can see that, like anger, we have fits of elation and break

through the veil, but of course the veil comes back when we look the other way.

In my opinion, the Zen industry is about the teacher-student relationship, forging a new relationship with the self, and to keep trying to see what this kensho business is about. Until one finds out 'what is', etc, you are not much good to anyone else. People need to sit down, that is my program, sit down and stay there until you find out, "why born? Why die? What does the predicament of being in the body mean? What does

"beyond the physical body" mean? Can't be "out" until thoroughly "in" - the "in-ness and out-ness" thing. And how to do laundry? I got a whole lot of dead underwear waiting in the washer upstairs.



Dogen

HSZC NEWS

Zendo Use Policy: At the January board meeting we decided to ask students and others to sit in the Zendo only during scheduled periods of meditation. Zenshin says this policy is a hangover from Japan where in order to be in the Zendo you have to be a monk, one can't just casually go in. "Generally speaking, the fewer people coming in and out the better. People want to clear their minds, but things tend to vanish." Individual exceptions by prior arrangement only.

Myo has been acting as liaison between HSZC and the other groups meeting here. "We want to encourage the development of the groups who meet here," says Myo. "But it's key that one person in these groups takes responsibility for collecting donations and restoring the zendo, since as Ino sometimes I am spread rather thin." Myo reports that **Avi Magidoff** has kindly consented to be the contact person and information conduit for the Mindfulness Group, even though Avi describes their organization as anarchistic and with no leader.

Response to the **Fund raising letter** sent out in December was fabulous. Thank you.

At the **February Board meeting**, **David Prowler** gave a "report from under the floor," an update on HSZC's foundation. He talked with engineer **John Horner**, who replaced some of the building studs 5 years ago. "The front foundation area is inaccessible due to the slope of the soil. The whole floor would have to be pulled up in order to examine this area. John Horner feels that we have done all that a responsible person would do to secure the foundation." **Zenshin** commented, "It's still not clear to me whether the building is standing or falling. It's that form - emptiness thing."

FIRE EXIT installation estimates on HSZC were presented by **Marty Kidwell**, who reported more complications and expense than were first apparent. "The overhang in front of the building would require that balconies be installed to service the second and third floors. Another option would be to bolt the ladder to the rear of the building down to the porch roof, then another ladder to the ground. This would be a less expensive option, but lots of code issues would need investigation."

In the meantime, **Ken Ireland** has provided residents with a temporary chain fire ladder for the third floor. **Jim Douglas** and **Myo** promised to have a fire drill to ensure the ladder is long enough to

reach the porch roof. **Zenshin** was pessimistic, "The porch may already be engulfed by flames."

HSZC signs for front porch: **Myo** acquired 2 planks of natural redwood burl. **Kaz Tanahashi** has agreed to do the calligraphy for the Chinese sign, and we are still looking for someone to do the English calligraphy for the other sign. A Dharma banner will be created and hung outside to announce lectures: **Zenshin** reports that sangha member **Top** is "deeply involved, everything is happening with it, but it is not clear how. Don't worry, it will suddenly appear!"

At the **March Board meeting**, **Myo** apologized for not doing the Ino job thoroughly in the evening because he works full time. "I will be there for evening service when I can, but not in my more elegant robed style." **Zenshin** replied, "It is very valuable to me what you do in the morning. The evening thing lurches along OK, we fake it some way or another and it gets covered."

HSZC HISTORY

Interview with Del Carlson

Del Carlson's Buddhist name is "E Gyoku Seki Ryu", translated from Japanese as "Wisdom Gem Stone Dragon". Since his first summer season at Tassahara in the 1960's, 27 years later Del is still doing it. The drawings of hands peeling and cutting vegetables in the dining room of HSZC were made by Del, and reproduced in the Tassahara cookbook.

I got involved with Buddhism in the mid-60's. I was a public school teacher in Art History, and a counsellor, and had a sabbatical coming up. So I thought, I will just go around the world and visit monasteries. I had been interested in and practicing meditation most of my adult life, mainly in the tradition of the great Catholic saints: St. John of the Cross and Theresa of Avila. Also I'd been in Jungian analysis for 10 years, working through my dreams and paintings, which were indicating it was time to leave 'kith and kin' and go away.

Zen Center had been sending me information for years, so I wrote them to see about getting introductions to monasteries in Japan, and included a resume - I was quite naive! I got a letter back from the President and Secretary of Zen Center, Yvonne Rand, who turned out to be an old friend of mine from Stanford. She suggested that I go to Tassajara

to get an idea of what Zen practice is all about. I spent three weeks there during the summer schedule, and that was when I first met Issan Dorsey.

Then I took off to South East Asia for one year, with my letter of introduction from Zen Center and two other contacts – a friend in Thailand I had gone to college with, and an Indian guru with an ashram in Puna, whom I'd met while at Stanford University. It was a perfect time to travel, since Buddhism hadn't really become that popular, so I could visit these places with hardly any tourists. At the end of my three months with the guru in India, he sent me on this little journey to the various Buddhist holy places – Bodhgaya, Varanasi, Saranath. It was all new to me and I just went with it.

When I was in Japan at Eihei-ji for 14 days, one of the things that really struck me – In the morning hundreds of monks came out and stood in line to do work, all holding brooms. I was much taller than most of them, and had long hair and a beard. It was autumn and all the beautiful leaves were falling. They wanted us to go to the top of the little hills and sweep all the leaves down, so it would be all mossy green like you see in pictures.

And I thought, "My God! sweeping leaves off rocks, how absolutely outrageous." But then a little monk came up to me, I guess he sensed something, and he took the little broom, and as he swept he said "ZA-ZEN, ZA-ZEN." And it clicked, it was one of my enlightening experiences. I saw that whatever you are doing, it's zazen. The monks also took a photo of me beside a picture of Bodhidharma, with his thick beard and earring.

When I came back from Asia, I went down to Tassajara and spent the summer working in the kitchen. My relationship with Issan blossomed, we seemed to get along quite well. I started going to Page Street Zen Center every weekend because Baker Roshi said, "you should come around and let people meet you." So I did. And in the process I developed a firmer relationship with Issan. I began to work with Baker Roshi, he was my teacher, and I sewed the rakasu around 1972-73.

One time I had dokusan with him and I was wearing some jewelry, rings and things. When we got through dokusan Baker Roshi said, "When you come to Zen Center and dokusan, you should come naked, you shouldn't have on any adornments." After the ceremony for lay ordination, Baker Roshi said, "You are the first student with a ring in his ear and toe that I gave ordination to." I received the Buddhist name "Wisdom Gem Stone Dragon", "E Gyoku Seki Ryu".

Around 1984-85, Zen Center was asked by some roshi, maybe Aitken Roshi, "What, if anything, is Zen Center doing for the AIDS epidemic?" because then it was really becoming quite big. Baker Roshi suggested that Issan come to HSZC, and that's how I got involved here. I was still teaching then, and would come up from Palo Alto on Friday and stay until Sunday night or Monday morning. After I retired, I came up 4-5 days a week, and when Issan developed the hospice, I started volunteering.

I practiced with Issan and chauffeured him around to services and weddings. We got along well, and I knew a lot of his friends. Issan would invite me to go to Sonoma to visit with the troupe of people he used to dance and work with – the costume designer, the manager and some of the other people he kept the bonds with. Over the years, we'd often take two days or so and stay with these people. Issan was a very interesting person, very accepting. He was friendly to everyone, and made everyone feel at home. I can't say our relationship was the most close, because I don't think he thought in those terms, but he was my spiritual soul mate.

After Issan's death, I continued here at HSZC working in the hospice, helping David Bullock in kitchen doing food prep work. Now I mainly dedicate one day a week to Philip, take him shopping, read to him or whatever. Zenshin has really helped consolidate the practice at HSZC. Then in afternoon if he's napping, I come volunteer with residents, but not all the time like I used to.

Mainly I sit with people in their room, especially when they are quite ill, and just be a presence. Right now I'm hanging out with Brian, a young Buddhist practitioner here, and also teaching another young man how to crochet. I do the crafts, needlepoint and crochet, mainly because I developed arthritis in my hands. It's very meditative work, you can say a mantra, its like saying the rosary.

There is something very special about Maitri. Residents all have their own room, bring their stuff with them and carry on life like at home. I think the Buddhist influence provides a strong presence here. I've talked to some of the care-givers and nurses and they've been to other places and they all say there is something unique about Maitri. People do feel a certain presence. And when Maitri moves, I will continue to offer my time. If there is anything positive about the AIDS epidemic, I think it has taught the country something about facing death and living with it and working with it – AIDS has opened up a whole way for people to look at their mortality.

MAITRI NEWS

Relocation Update: Construction on the new site at 401 Duboce Street begins May 1st and Maitri's move from Hartford Street is targeted for early Fall. Maitri is asking for volunteers to help deconstruct 401 Duboce Street, since Maitri has taken on a large part of the demolition duties. Please contact **George** or **Tové** at 863-8508 if you feel like punching a hole in a wall (instead of just staring at it).

The kick-off party for the Capital Campaign drive will be held in May. There has been good momentum for assembling the Honorary Fund Raising Committee of politicians, religious leaders, entertainers, artists, and other concerned constituencies. **Patti Smith** performed a second benefit at Slim's on March 19th, and raised \$6,000 for Maitri.

Resident News: On February 26th, Maitri held a memorial service for long time resident and friend, **David**, who died Valentine's Day. A beautiful shrine was created on the front porch, where David's presence had blessed the street for over a year. His empty wheel chair was filled with offerings of flowers and cigarettes by residents, friends, neighbors and volunteers. There was a card from **Ma**: "You became part of my life and now you are gone. I'm jealous of God." Also, please offer strong wishes for the happiness of **Patric**, who died in January, and **Larry** and **Robert**, who died in February.

Welcome to Maitri's new residents: **Beau** moved in Dec. 22nd. **Brian** and **Howard** arrived in February, and **Fred** and **Tony** in March. **Tové** says that residents have been asking to get out more often as the weather improves and loved recent outings to see the drag show **Lypsynka** at Josie's Juice Bar and Cabaret, and **Patti Smith** at Slim's.

Volunteer Orientation: Saturday, May 4th. The program will include brief talks on Maitri history, current resident needs, house idiosyncracies and a volunteer party. New volunteers in all capacities – emotional, practical, kitchen and massage – should try to attend. The training will be held at Growth House, 3927 17th Street.

In-Service Lectures: *A Tibetan Buddhist View of the Stages of Death and Dying*, with the Venerable **Robina Courtin**. Wednesday, May 1st, 7:30 pm. In June, the In-Service lecture will be *Pagan Rituals around Death and Dying*. For information call **Tové** at 863-8508.

MEMBER'S FORUM

alt.sangha.flame

*We welcome your letters, comments, and ideas. Next newsletter deadline: June 1st. Contact **Jennifer Birkett** (415) 647-0465, or write c/o HSZC.*

Dealing With Death and Dying in Western Society

by Bernd Bender

Three weeks ago, during a visit, I suddenly noticed that my father was no longer merely very sick, but had actually begun to die. It took him one week and he literally fell apart during his last days. Fortunately his doctor was open enough to give him a lot of morphine. Then one afternoon, he stopped breathing.

The next day I sat with him. His body was kind of stacked away into a closet in the basement of a nursing home. I brought him flowers and the longer I sat with him looking into his face, the more comfortable, happy and reassured I became. I just knew that in the end he was "cured from his sentiments." And at least for a little while I was also cured. A feeling of being very familiar with death and dying as if I thoroughly knew it. Before I left my father I renounced whatever is alive in me and entered into a solidarity with the dead. I felt very much 'akin'.

I knew that this great difference between him being dead and me being alive was not so great after all. In this long genealogy from primordial time I'm simply the next in line. Four years, 40 years, no big difference. It will be soon. But instead of this being morbid, I felt that all of this, myself, my dead father, are very much alive. And during the funeral when it started to rain, right when the coffin was lowered into the ground, I thought "Oh! Dad and the universe are having sex. No longer separate." And the fluids of their doing it rained on me, their son.

Coming Out of the Spiritual Closet

by Ron Wickliffe

A close friend of mine who felt robbed of his spirituality started attending church the last year of his life. At the time, his spiritual reawakening was

beyond my comprehension, even though we talked deeply about it. From early childhood my reactions to Christianity had been negative. I always felt like an "outsider". Later in life, I understood it was my homosexuality that made me different, but by that time I'd already internalized a profound self-directed homophobia. I married in the mistaken belief this would make me "straight", and fathered a child.

I "came out" during the late 70's, just around the time when Harvey Milk was assassinated by Dan White. The "Moral Majority" was targeting Castro and Polk streets, and Christian evangelists were coming here from all over the country to hold rallies. I remember a group of men marching up Market Street singing "Onward Christian Soldiers", wearing Tee-shirts emblazoned "Kill a Queer for Christ" on the front and "Army of the Lord" on the back. Homophobic assaults became a daily fact of life. I was assaulted twice. A close friend lost an eye in a brutal attack as he left a Gay bar one night. My negative feelings about Christianity and religion, harbored since childhood, congealed into a seething resentment. Even so, I felt something important was missing from my life, but I became seriously agitated whenever I tried to talk or think about it.

I discovered HSZC in 1993 and for over a year I immersed myself in daily practice. I read dozens of Zen books, bought a zafu and started sitting at home. I became a Doan, attended one-day sittings, thought about taking lay initiation, and was elected to the Board of Directors. In other words I went from one extreme to the other. Then I experienced a strong backlash. I stopped attending zazen completely and stayed away from the Zen Center for several months, trying to separate religious dogma from my meditation experience.

What I came to realize is that people express their spirituality according to their own needs. The danger for everyone is a descent into destructive fanaticism, treating those who do not share their beliefs with contempt. Zenshin often told me, "Just sit, Dammit", but a long and painful head-banging process ensued before I got it through my thick skull what *just sitting* meant. Now I can sit anywhere, anytime, whenever I feel like it, with or without a zafu, and I do.

I am deeply grateful to both HSZC and Zenshin for this realization. And I now understand my dying friend's rediscovery of his long-denied spirituality. Anytime we suppress part of our soul, we are hiding. And there is always another closet to come out of: sexual, political, HIV, spiritual, emotional...

CLASSIFIEDS & DHARMA EVENTS

Individuals and groups are invited to submit ads for consideration. Next newsletter deadline: June 1st. Contact Jennifer Birkett (415) 647-0465, or write c/o HSZC.

MEDICINE BUDDHA INITIATION

with Lopon Tsechu Rinpoche

Tuesday, April 23rd, 7:00 pm

Cowell Theater, Fort Mason

\$15 donation

Call KCL Buddhist Center (415) 661-6467

for more information

DEATH, DYING and REBIRTH

with Lama Ole Nydahl

Monday, April 22nd, 7:30 pm

Cathedral Hill Hotel

\$7 donation

Call KCL Buddhist Center (415) 661-6467

for more information

GROUPS MEETING AT HSZC

DHARMA SISTER'S SITTING GROUP: Lesbian meditation and discussion group. Pan-denominational and Buddhist centered. Beginners and long term practitioners welcome. Meditation on Tuesdays, 7:20pm to 8:00pm, followed by discussion. Contact Jackie Weltman at (415)-255-0798.

SAN FRANCISCO MINDFULNESS COMMUNITY: Students of Thich Nhat Hanh. 2nd and 4th Sunday, 9:30am to noon. Monday nights, 7:30pm to 9:00pm. Meditation, precept recitation and discussion. Contact: Avi Magidoff at (415)-252-8452.

HSZC SCHEDULE

MORNING: Monday to Saturday.

Zazen 5:00am to 5:40am.

Kinhen 5:40am to 5:50am.

Zazen 5:50am to 6:30am, followed by Service

EVENING: Monday to Friday.

Zazen 6:00pm to 6:40pm, followed by Service.

SATURDAY: Informal Zazen 9:10am to 10:00am.

You may enter any time before 10:00am. DHARMA TALK by Abbot Zenshin Whalen at 10:00am, followed by tea and discussion. Donation appreciated.

MONDAY: Introduction to Zazen and ZENDO practice forms at 5:00pm. Call for appointment.

DINNER: Dinner is open to the community MONDAY night after zazen. \$5 donation suggested.

MONTHLY MEMORIAL SERVICE: A memorial service is held for Temple Founder, Issan Dorsey Roshi, on the 6th day of each month.

ZENDO PROTOCOL: Arrive at least 5 minutes before zazen. Bow as you enter the sitting area and when crossing in front of the altar. Once seated and the bell has rung, be as still as possible.

MEMBERSHIP: Practicing Members sit regularly, may attend dokusan with Zenshin, and contribute a suggested \$40/month. Those who wish to support the temple are encouraged to become Annual Members at \$20/year and will receive newsletters by mail.

BOOK SIGNING PARTY: Sponsored by Parallax Press for P.W. alias Zenshin Ryfu's *Canoeing up Cabarga Creek*, a retrospective collection of his Buddhist poetry. The party will take place after the 10:00am Lecture, Saturday, April 27th. All are welcome.

INTRODUCTORY AFTERNOON: Saturday, June 22nd. 1:00pm to 4:30pm. For those wishing to learn more details of Zen practice at HSZC. Instruction in sitting and walking meditation, followed by discussions on practice related questions and advice on how to start a regular practice. Sign up by June 10th. Sheet on bulletin board.

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